



EFFECTIVE DATE: August 12, 2013

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LATEST REVISION: N/A

SUBJECT: Communications and Interactions with the Public and the Media

I. PURPOSE

- A. To establish uniform departmental policy and procedures for public communications that are intended for, or should reasonably be expected to have, broad distribution outside the Department of Children and Families (DCF), including, but not limited to, relations with the media, the public, government officials, and stakeholders; and
- B. To educate and inform members of the public about important events or newsworthy items related to the department's mission.

II. SCOPE

This Order has department-wide applicability. The Commissioner reserves the right to delegate responsibility under this policy as necessary to effectuate the mission of the department.

This Order does not apply to requests for public records made pursuant to the New Jersey Open Public Records Act, P.L. 2001, c. 404 (N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1 et seq.). It does not apply to testimony before the Legislature or information or written materials provided to the Legislature, nor does it apply to policy development, rulemakings, adjudications, or publications in the New Jersey Register.

III. AUTHORITY

N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.10a

N.J.A.C. 10:133G

IV. DEFINITIONS

The following term(s), when used in this Order, have the meanings indicated:

"Executive staff member" means an individual identified by the Commissioner as a member of Executive Management who is responsible for one or more of the Department's primary Offices or Divisions.

“Public communication” means any communication that is intended for, or should reasonably be expected to have, broad distribution outside DCF, including:

- Public speeches, news releases and advisories, broadcast appearances, newsletters, and interviews with journalists;
- Public writings, such as articles, brochures, pamphlets, booklets, or other writings, including writings distributed through email, posted on a website, or distributed through social media;
- Public educational instruction and/or lectures, conferences, seminars, etc.¹; and
- Public distribution of audiovisual works.

V. POLICY

The Department of Children and Families is committed to open, honest two-way communication with the public.

This Administrative Order is intended to assist and guide department employees in communicating with the public as well as to coordinate information sharing with the press and public about the many activities, accomplishments, concerns, messages, priorities, and objectives of the Department of Children and Families. It is of paramount importance that all communications are accurate, informative, and reflective of these policies set by the Commissioner.

In our efforts to communicate openly, however, we must be careful not to allow our communication practices to overshadow the privacy rights of the individual and the department’s legitimate confidentiality obligations surrounding information in its possession. The requirements and procedures set forth here are intended to accommodate these competing rights and interests.

VI. RESPONSIBILITIES AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

A. Department of Children and Families - Office of Communications and Public Affairs

The DCF Office of Communications and Public Affairs will take the lead in working and communicating with the press.

The DCF Office of Communications and Public Affairs will:

1. Oversee public communication activities, including, but not limited to, press relations, web sites, use of social media, publications, speeches, briefings, etc.;

¹ This does not include information or educational materials developed in the regular course of business that are intended to be imparted to community partners and stakeholder groups.

2. Maintain effective relations with the press, public, other governmental entities, community groups, and organizations;
3. Issue all press releases, op-ed pieces, columns, and letters to the editor;
4. Keep executive staff members advised of press inquiries as appropriate;
5. Ensure that pertinent information regarding department activities is shared with the press in a timely manner when appropriate; and
6. Consult with the appropriate authorities before releasing information to the public.

B. Executive Staff Members

Executive staff members will:

1. Keep their staff members informed about the department's public communication procedure and related policies and ensure that the procedure and policies are followed by all employees;
2. Notify the Director of Communications and Public Affairs about press inquiries; and
3. Keep the Office of Communications and Public Affairs informed about interesting and innovative programs and newsworthy activities within their Divisions or Offices. As much as possible, they should anticipate issues that could evoke controversy and keep the Director of Communications and Public Affairs informed to help plan and execute appropriate communications strategies.

VII. PROCEDURES

A. Press Releases and other submissions to the press

Press releases will be prepared by the Office of Communications and Public Affairs. Executive staff members responsible for the action or information to be announced should provide a summary memo to the Office of Communications and Public Affairs which should provide all relevant information, including but not limited to:

- What is being announced;
- Will an event be held and where;
- Does the event have a sponsor and what is their role;
- What are the most important messages to be conveyed;

- If funding (i.e. grants) is involved: how much funding; what is the funding source; and how long will the funding last;
- Who is the target audience and who stands to benefit from the subject of the announcement;
- Could the announcement be controversial;
- What is the benefit to DCF and/or the community to issue the announcement;
- Are there any interested parties: stakeholders, legislators, advocacy groups, etc.; and
- Provide information related to any past or expected media coverage on this similar topic/event.

Whenever possible, the summary memo should be submitted at least two weeks prior to the proposed release date. A draft release based upon information provided in the memo, with input from the Commissioner and other key department officials, will be submitted to the appropriate executive staff member and other staff, as necessary, for approval.

All press releases, op-ed pieces, columns, and letters to the editor require the approval of the Director of Communications and Public Affairs and the Commissioner. That review process is facilitated and managed by the Director of Communications and Public Affairs.

B. Publications and Materials

1. All public communications and materials produced by an individual, unit, or Division/Office must be reviewed and approved by the Office of Communications and Public Affairs before finalization and dissemination.
2. Only DCF-approved branding materials may be used in conjunction with any materials for public use. No personal statements, quotes, logos, etc. should be used. Decisions regarding the use of the State seal, Governor's logo or name, and related items will be made by the Office of Communications and Public Affairs.
3. Any material developed by a DCF employee to be published, regardless of whether as a part of his/her official duties and regardless of whether done for compensation, must be reviewed and approved by the DCF Ethics Liaison Officer (ELO) to confirm compliance with the State Conflict of Interest Law and associated regulations and guidance materials.

C. Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities

The Department of Children and Families' Office of Communications and Public Affairs shall direct and control the release of information to the media about a child fatality or near fatality determined to be the result of abuse or neglect. Information shall only be disclosed by the Commissioner or designee or a representative of the Department's Office

Communications and Public Affairs. No other representative of the Division or the Department shall disclose information to the media or a member of the public unless specifically authorized to do so by the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families.

The media may request information about a child fatality or near fatality either verbally or in writing. All requests should be directed to the Department of Children and Families' Office of Communications and Public Affairs.

D. Safe Haven

All inquiries regarding a Safe Haven infant or the New Jersey Safe Haven Infant Protection Act, P.L.2000, c.58 (C.30:4C-15.5), shall be referred to the Office of Communications and Public Affairs.

E. Emergencies and Situations Likely to Garner Public Attention

In the event of an emergency or other situation involving staff or clients that is likely to garner public attention, the Executive staff member responsible for the involved Division, Office, or Unit shall notify the Commissioner and the Office of Communications and Public Affairs as soon as possible. After obtaining full information from the involved Executive staff member, the Office of Communications and Public Affairs will be responsible for related public communications.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison Blake". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Allison Blake, Ph.D., L.S.W.
Commissioner